

THE MORALITY

OF

NUCLEAR WARFARE

From the
Catholic Viewpoint

MONOGRAPH

submitted by

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INTRODUCTION

On the morning of August 6th, 1945 a new era dawned for mankind--the so-called "Nuclear Age". Few events in the history of man have presaged such tremendous ~~such tremendous~~ consequences, yet where it would be expected that any event of such startling proportions would be another landmark in the progress of man's progress, it has opened a frightful chasm of fear at the feet of mankind. To destroy the balance of terror without provoking a frightful cataclysm, to bridge this yawning gap which threatens all of man's future hopes and aspirations, mankind must first find a way to limit the dread potentialities of nuclear warfare.

The effect of one bomb dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on that eventful August day in 1945 has been to change all our previous conceptions of the killing and destructive possibilities of war. After reviewing the political and military lessons of the war in Europe, Dwight D. Eisenhower in his Crusade in Europe stated that when the first nuclear bomb exploded over Japan:

In an instant many of the old concepts of war were swept away. Hence forth, it would seem, the purpose of an aggressor would be to stock atom bombs in quantity, and to employ them by surprise against the industrial fabric and the population centers of the intended victim. Offensive methods would largely concern themselves with the certainty, the volume, and the accuracy of delivery, while the defense would strive to prevent such delivery and in turn launch its store of atom bombs against the attacker's homeland. Even the bombed ruins of Germany suddenly seemed to provide but faint warning of what future war could mean to the people of the earth.¹

1. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, Garden City, New York, Permabooks, 1948, p. 495.

Certainly, the first and most important task for humanity is to remove the causes of strife, and prevent for all time a new global and total war. The Popes of the century, from the saintly Pius X to the present reigning Pontiff, have called for a complete renovation of society and the united effort of all free men to restore that "tranquillity of order" which is a peace based upon justice and charity. Only such a new order will guarantee a just peace. War is not a necessary element of human life nor are future wars inevitable. But, as long as the possibility of future wars is an admitted fact, there will remain the necessity of studying such wars in the light of fundamental principles of moral theology and christian ethics.

Has the nuclear age outmoded the existing principles and concepts? Does it call for a new morality? Michael Cardinal Faulhauber, the heroic archbishop of Munich, referring to the fast changing concepts of modern warfare, stated:

We are at a turning point in history, and there will be a change of outlook on the question of peace and war as on other questions...the moral theology of war will speak a new language. Whilst remaining faithful to its ancient principles concerning the lawfulness of war, it will take new facts into account.¹

Moral theologians are faced with the most difficult task of applying the basic known principles to the new facts of nuclear warfare, the potentialities of which exceed man's wildest dreams. All moralists are agreed that a solution to the problem must be

1. Cited in Canon E.J. Mahoney, Questions and Answers, London, Burns, Oates, publ. 1943-1950, II, P. 61, q. 393.

founded on the principles of the gospel of Christ, but not all are satisfied with each other's limitations of the use of nuclear weapons.

Christian ethics has never considered war to be intrinsically unjust, but it was hoped that Christian brotherly love would do away with the causes of war. From early Christian times, the great doctors of the Church have refused to condemn war absolutely. St. Ambrose condemned wars of looting, but, on the other hand, praised military fortitude in war as a Christian virtue. St. Augustine did not believe that he who serves in war cannot please God.

From the time of St. Ambrose and St. Augustine we can distinguish two movements. One was the attempt of the Church and men of good will to regularize and humanize the waging of war. The concept of war as a legitimate recourse to armed force only in the defense of justice was gradually recognized, at least theoretically, in international law. The limitations and mitigations imposed by the Christian recognition of the dignity of the individual and by the law of charity gradually influenced the conscience of men and the law of nations. A second movement, parallel in time but perhaps contrary in spirit, was the gradual and continuous development of new weapons and methods of warfare. Each technological development occasioned new effort to restrict the destructiveness of war.

While the world fervently hopes that nuclear warfare will be outlawed, it must be said, and not without justification from

history, that no new weapon or more effective method of inflicting death and destruction on an enemy has ever been developed which has not been put to use. Therefore, theologians of the present day must find the solution as to the application of general principles of morality to the problems of: a) total war, when forced upon a nation by an unscrupulous aggressor; b) limitations of use of weapons of mass destruction; c) the combatant status of the populations of belligerent nations.

CHAPTER I

PHILOSOPHIES OF THE
MORALITY OF WAR

The problem of the intrinsic morality of warfare may best be clarified by first posing three questions; 1) Is all modern war in itself evil? 2) If not, under what conditions, or in which situations would it be permissible to start or to engage in a modern war? 3) How may the traditional moral principles concerning the conduct of war be applied to the present conditions of warfare?

Among the answers to the first question there are two extreme views. The first, Pacifism, condemns all modern wars without distinction. At the other extreme are those who accept total global war without any restrictions or limitations, a philosophy sometimes referred to as Bellicism, or Instrumental Militarism.

A third philosophy, dealing with all three questions, is the traditional Christian philosophy which holds that war, with certain limitations, is morally defensible, even under present conditions. War was not, is not, and never will be regarded sinful in itself by the Catholic Church. The Christian can never admit that there is no alternative to a complete and abject submission to a ruthless and atheistic aggressor. There are spiritual possessions of the highest value that one may not yield regardless of cost.

In the following three sections, these three aspects of the morality of war will be treated at greater length.

Section 1. Pacifism.

The intelligent pacifist maintains that modern warfare is a "reductio ad absurdum", a conflict, not between armies, but between whole populations, a lunacy which can never be brought within the conditions prescribed for a just war; it is his duty and everybody's duty to refuse any type of war service.

Heinrich A. Rommen, in his The State and Catholic Thought¹ distinguishes pacifism into three main forms each influenced with the common idea of evolutionary progress that in the end will produce a stateless society, a "civitas maxima" of all mankind, where wars are superfluous because the true source of wars, the plurality of states, has been removed, and a millennial realm of peace and of perfect secure life will be attained.

The first of these forms, Economic Pacifism, deals with the economic futility of war. The basis of this reasoning is well expressed by Paul-Henri Spaak, writing in Foreign Affairs:

In our time, so-called victories no longer pay, and this will be even more true in times to come. No sensible person would say today that war solves problems, or that problems are easier to solve after a war than they were before. The plain fact is that war no longer pays...The Franco-German War of 1870 was the last war in Europe that brought some advantages to the victor...By the time of the First World War the results of victory already were very different...Since the Second World War this process has been even more marked...As to the Third World War, the war which may break out tomorrow...it may seem exaggerated to say that humanity would be entirely destroyed, but there can be no doubt that the cataclysm would be immense, and the losses incalculable.²

1. Heinrich A. Rommen, The State and Catholic Thought, St. Louis, Missouri, B. Herder Book Co., 1945, p. 643.

2. Paul-Henri Spaak, "The Atom Bomb and NATO", Foreign Affairs XXXIII, No. 3, April, 1955, p. 353.

The second form may be classified as Humanitarian Pacifism and is divided into two groups whose specific interests seem to be directed toward mankind rather than to national states. The first of these groups comprises scholars, literary men, and artists who try, on a secularized basis, to emulate the medieval idea of a unified "orbis christianus". These tend to "debunk" what they call the myths of national histories, heros, and governments. The second group embraces the pacifism that found its home in the modern proletarian movement of international socialism. They maintain that states are only instruments of exploitation by the capitalist classes, and all wars are rooted in the existence of these exploiting instruments. Once the proletariat, whose very existence directs it to mankind, and not to states or nations, rises in a world revolution, it will, after the short period of proletarian dictatorship, give birth to a "civitas maxima" without classes, states, or nations, and consequently, without wars.

The third form of pacifism finds its strongest expression based on religious beliefs, and ranges from the doctrine of non-resistance of Mahatma Ghandi through many Christian sects (e.g., Quakers, Mennonites, Jehovah's Witnesses) to groups in the Catholic Church. The Friends and Mennonites believe Christianity and peace to be so identical that war of any kind is forbidden to the disciples of Christ. In the Catholic Church since World War I, certain youth groups and authors, laymen as well as priests, with-

out any intention of abandoning the traditional doctrine, began to propound the theory that because of the modern technological developments of our time, a just war must be considered impossible. They held that one of the requirements of a just war, the suitability of the means of war to the purpose of war, cannot be met today. These proponents of "Christian Pacifism" today find their champion in Father Franziskus Strattman, O.P., long time director of the Catholic Peace Union in Germany.

A fourth form of pacifism, omitted in Remmen's categories, came into vogue since the explosion of the first nuclear bomb, and is based, apparently, on a craven fear of nuclear warfare. It advocates peace at any price; the slogan "lieber rot als tot" (rather red than dead) echoed throughout Germany after the first nuclear explosion and has been repeated by many who would prefer the tyranny of Communism to death in modern warfare.

Section 2 - Bellicism (Instrumental Militarism)

Diametrically opposed to the pacifists are those who accept global war without any restrictions. They consider war as a normal and necessary condition of life, and that the end, victory, justifies any means to attain it. Nietzsche so glorified the use of force that war is its own justification. For Hobbes, Hegel, and Marx, war is a law of nature. The concept of total war was advocated in Germany even before Hitler launched one in fact. General Von Ludendorff developed this strategic conception in his

work, Der Totale Krieg, stating that to wage a successful war it is indispensable to attack all the enemy's centers of production so that he cannot produce war materials or carry on peacetime business with which to obtain foreign exchange to purchase the nation's requirements abroad. He emphasized the importance of total industrial mobilization and total industrial destruction by airplane bombardment. He also hinted at bacteriological warfare to be used against agricultural crops, thereby destroying the food¹ which makes for the resistance of the enemy.

Total war, as inaugurated by Hitler in 1939, brought with it a degeneration in national conduct producing profound public consequences. Today, the total population is involved; the needs of technological developments embrace so much organization for armament and supply that the battle front has moved into every city, town, and village. There is no rear, there is no escape, and there is no shield of legal status. Such are the calamitous consequences and future prospects engendered by the crass materialism of Communism and the cynical secularism of the Nazi philosophy of state.

Section 3 - The Scholastic Viewpoint.

The Scholastic philosophy on war, the basis of the traditional position of the Catholic Church, outlines certain principles by which the justice of war may be ascertained. One must bear in

1. Cited in Edmund A. Walsh, Total Empire, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Bruce Publishing Co., 1951,

mind that war is an instance of the general moral power of coercion, the power to make use of physical force to conserve one's inviolable rights. The right of war, therefore, is the right of a sovereign state to wage a contention at arms against another when the rights of the former are in danger from the latter. There are limits to which this right of coercion can be extended--the exercise of the right must be necessary, and injury to persons or property must not be inflicted beyond measure. These principles may be more specifically stated in this fashion:

- 1) The war must be declared by legitimate authority.
- 2) A just cause must be given, and a proper proportion must exist between the destruction caused and the good achieved.
- 3) All peaceful attempts at settling the controversy must have failed, war being the last resort.
- 4) There must be moral certainty of the successful outcome.
- 5) Those waging the war must use just means, both in battle and after victory has been attained.
- 6) There must be the right intention--this condition being the most important in determining the formal morality of the actions of both rulers and soldiers.

The scholastics did not contend that all aggressive wars were unjust, therefore, the distinction between a just and an unjust war is not identical with the distinction between aggress-

ive and defensive war, however it may be presumed that justice normally rests with the defender. They placed two important limitations, however, on the defender, i.e., that the innocent may never be directly attacked even as a means of getting at the guilty, and that violence must be justly proportionate.

The Catholic Church looks upon war, not as a natural or an irrational event like a thunder storm or an earthquake, but rather as a means to defend rights, or to restore the international order of peace. War is principally a problem of political ethics and of justice; the art of warfare is merely a servant controlled by moral and juridical categories. When war and the art of war are made ends in themselves, there results a cruel immoral militarism and the subordination of all values to the technicalities of strategy and tactics, raging with destructive power through the world trampling down peace, justice, and civil order.

CHAPTER II

CATHOLIC MORAL TEACHINGAPPLIED TO NUCLEAR WAR

The guiding moral principles governing nuclear warfare, as well as the use of other weapons of mass destruction (chemical and biological warfare), have been laid down by Pope Pius XII in a number of addresses to the faithful. However, in the application of these principles there is still room for speculation concerning some of the terms contained in these pronouncements, but from their content two conclusions seem to follow:

The first is that a war of aggression can no longer be considered lawful under any circumstances. This, of course, has always been true of any war undertaken without a just cause in the scholastic sense, indeed said Pius XII:

Every war of aggression against those goods which the divine ordnance of peace obliges us unconditionally to respect and guarantee, and therefore also to protect and defend, is a sin, a crime, an outrage against the majesty of God.¹

But it would seem to be true, in the present situation, even of a war initiated by an individual state to obtain redress of a grievance such as might, in the past, have satisfied the scholastic requirement of a just cause; because the vastly increased violence of modern war and its tendency to ignite the world render it unfit as an apt and proportionate means of such redress. Also, the individual resort to war undermines that national authority which

1. Pius XII, "Christmas Message" (1945), Acta Apostolica Sedis, XLI, 1949, p. 13.

is necessary to the common good of mankind. The Pope did not state this categorically, but it would seem to be implicit, as a moral appraisal of the present situation, in his statement that:

It is a duty binding upon all...to do everything possible to proscribe and banish the war of aggression for all as a legitimate solution of international disputes, and as an instrument of national inspirations.¹

and further that:

at the head of the list comes the crime of modern war which is not demanded by the absolute necessity of self-defense and which involves--we can say it without hesitation--unimaginable pain, suffering, and horror.

Secondly, a defensive war to repel an unjust aggression, or at least one backed by military force, remains morally lawful both in principle and in fact. Concerning this the Pope was much more explicit:

A people menaced by, or already victim of, an unjust aggression, if it would think and act in Christian fashion, cannot remain in a passive indifference; even more does the solidarity of the family of nations forbid others to behave as mere spectators in an attitude of passive neutrality. Who can ever estimate the damage already occasioned in the past by such an indifference, so alien to Christian feeling, towards war of aggression?...One thing is certain: the precept of peace is of divine law. Its end is the protection of the goods of humanity, in as much as they are the goods of the Creator. But some of these goods are of such importance for human society, that their defense against unjust aggression is, without doubt, fully legitimate.³

The Pope was at first somewhat negative in regard to the use of nuclear weapons in self-defense, but, on the other hand, he never condemned them outright. This is evident from his declaration that:

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1. Pius XII, "Christmas Message" (1944), Acta Apostolicae Sedis, XXXVII, 1945, p. 18.
 2. Pius XII, "Allocution of 3 October 1953", Acta Apostolicae Sedis, XLV, 1953, p. 730.
 3. Pius XII, "Christmas Message" (1948), Acta Apostolicae Sedis, XLI, 1949, p. 13.

there can be no question, even in principle, of the lawfulness of atomic, chemical, and bacteriological warfare, except when, in the situation described above (when a state is "forced into it by an evident, extremely grave and otherwise unavoidable injustice") it must be judged indispensable to self-defense.¹

The Hungarian episode and the Russian threats which followed the Suez incident drew from him a more positive admission:

When the possible stages of negotiation and mediation are by-passed and a threat is made to use atomic weapons to obtain concrete demands, justified or not, a nation can find itself in the situation in which, every effort to avert war having proved vain, a war to defend itself efficaciously and with hope of success against unjust attacks cannot be considered illicit.²

In the foregoing statements it seems that the Pope laid as much stress on the conditions and limitations of the principles as on the principles themselves. Before a state can legitimately accept the challenge of war in self-defense, three conditions must be fulfilled:

- 1) It must be the victim of an evident and extremely grave aggression which cannot otherwise be averted or repelled.
- 2) It must have a reasonable hope of achieving its end of self-defense.
- 3) It must have a reasonable ground for believing that the evil liable to result from resistance to the injustice will be less than the evil involved in submission to it.

Moreover, even in a war of self-defense which satisfies these three preliminary conditions, no intrinsically evil act,

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1. Pius XII, "Allocution of 30 September 1954", Acta Sedis Apostolicae, XLVI, 1954, p. 589.
 2. Pius XII, "Christmas Message" (1956), Acta Apostolicae Sedis, XLIX, 1957, p. 19.

such as direct killing of the innocent, may ever be done, whatever the provocation and whatever the consequences of refraining from such actions; no more violence may be used as is reasonably necessary to self-defense; and in particular, no weapons may be used, the evil effects of which entirely escape the control of man.

In drawing a moral conclusion as to the application of the principles enunciated, one must be careful to distinguish between the three preliminary conditions which are required to justify the very undertaking of a war of self-defense, and the rules which govern the conduct of a war justly undertaken. To lump them together, as some do, treating them all as conditions of liceity in the same sense, inevitably fogs the issue and leads to wrong conclusions. If the conditions are not fulfilled, the war itself will not be justified, and therefore no one may lawfully cooperate formally in it. If, though, the conditions are fulfilled, the rules of moral conduct are not observed, no one, conscript or not, may cooperate formally with those who violate them, but the cause itself does not become unlawful for those members of the self defending state who limit themselves to morally lawful acts, or even necessarily to the state itself.

It is, therefore, illogical to conclude that, because nuclear weapons are almost certain to be used immorally, no one can lawfully have anything to do with a war in which they are used, and consequently that every one has a moral duty, or at least a

moral right, to contract out in advance from any such war by conscientious objection.

It is also not possible to base a conclusion of this kind on the premises that the conditions required for a justifiable war of self-defense simply cannot be fulfilled by any war in which nuclear weapons are to be used, but it is hoped that both belligerents will limit themselves to conventional weapons or to tactical nuclear devices which can be used with discrimination on legitimate targets.

Before concluding this discussion, two concepts should be evaluated in the light of modern warfare, first, the definition of "aggressor", second, the difference between combatants in so much as they constitute a military target.

"Aggression" in the older military-moral sense has ceased to be a standard by which to decide the issue of justice in war, it has simply become a technique by which to decide the issue of success, i.e., in view of the striking power of modern weapons systems, the nation that initiates the attack can render the opposing nation defenseless, incapable of exerting the right of self-defense. Also, these weapons systems make possible the employment of force at enormous distances without concern for the space between, so that the concept that the aggressor is the first "to cross the border" means nothing. Therefore the aggressor is to be presumed as the state which is about to make an attack with nuclear weapons and this fact must be known with convincing certitude. Consequently, the defending nation may make the initial move without sacrificing its position as the defender, be-

cause neither reason, nor theology, nor morals require men or nations to commit suicide by awaiting the first blow involving nuclear weapons from a power with no moral inhibitions.

As to the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, there is a perplexing question in that nations now think on terms of total mobilization of the population. The answer, however, still rests on the degree of participation, i.e. some are directly involved, others only indirectly, while there are still more who have nothing to do with it what-so-ever, such as infants and small children, the bedridden, the very old, and the insane. It is the opinion of L.L. McAreavy, in an article for Commonweal, that when a nuclear bomb is released over a predominantly civilian town, one cannot reasonably claim that only the destruction of the war potential is intended and that the slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians is but a matter of regret. The direct and immediate effect of a "town buster" is to destroy the town with everything in it: factories and hospitals, workers and wives, infants and infantry, all with the same impartial directness. It is therefore impossible to hold that a predominantly civilian town can ever be a legitimate target for so indiscriminate a weapon as a nuclear bomb without first abandoning the principles of morality in self-defense and substituting the principle of expediency.¹

1. L.L. McAreavy, "Morality and Nuclear War", Commonweal, LXVIII, No. 10, 1958, p. 248.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

The fundamental conclusion reached in this monograph is that the traditional scholastic doctrine as embodied in the teachings of the Catholic Church can be and should be applied to the conditions of nuclear warfare. This can be summarized in these particular conclusions.

1) The philosophies of Pacifism and Bellicism provide completely unsatisfactory answers. Pacifism is totally unrealistic in that those who embrace the doctrine as lovers of peace indulge in an emotional and merely negative attitude, forgetting that international life, like all human efforts, lives under the law of imperfection, and therefore the will for peace must realize itself in strong new institutions, in which and through which the abstract demand for justice produces what is concretely just, even at the price of war. On the other hand, Bellicism, or Instrumental Militarism, is never concerned with the moral problem of war, but only with tactics and strategy, i.e. the mere technique of war. This militarism, when set free from moral obligation, makes war a craft to be practiced by human hordes of robots unable to rebuild, able only to destroy.

2) More than ever, the importance and necessity of peace is apparent as an essential element in international society. The appeal to force can never be considered a normal element in

the relationship between peoples and states.

3) In itself, modern war is not intrinsically or necessarily immoral, as long as it is fought according to moral and juridical principles, and that the weapons are "controlled" by the belligerents.

4) No war would seem justifiable unless absolutely necessary for the legitimate defense of a community. The conditions for such a just war must be it is a defensive war initiated by legitimate authority with the right intention, and that the necessity of resisting the injustice is proportionate to the immense evils and sufferings which modern war causes for all men.

5) Even in legitimate self-defense a nation may never go to war until it has exhausted every other means of securing the just protection of its rights, or that attack with nuclear weapons by a morally unprincipled nation is known with convincing certitude to be absolutely imminent.

6) In a just war it is lawful to use every means which are necessary or apt for the defense of the common good, providing no means are used which are forbidden by the natural or positive law.

7) The distinction between combatants and non-combatants is still a valid norm in waging of war. No one is to be considered a combatant unless his cooperation in the war effort is immediate and vital. Direct attacks on innocent non-combatants, even as a means of forcing an unjust aggressor to surrender, are never justifiable.

8) The use of nuclear weapons and other methods of mass destruction on populated areas can be justified when such attacks are necessary and the objective is primarily a military target.

The experiences of two World Wars and the present threat of an even more terrible war, which would cause unthinkable devastation and suffering, make it essential that a just and lasting solution be found for the problems of international society which will outlaw war for all time. The only true solution for the problems of the modern world is to be found in a renovation of society and the universal acceptance of the basic principles of Christian justice and charity. Heeding the appeals of the Holy Father, each one of us has the duty to work for that end, being conscious that one does not undertake such a project with the utopian hope of reaching his goal today or tomorrow, but with calmness, flexibility, and tenacious perseverance, without which important enterprises almost never succeed.

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The intelligent pacifist maintains that modern warfare is a "reductio ad absurdum", a conflict, not between armies, but between whole populations, a lunacy which can never be brought within the conditions prescribed for a just war; it is his duty and every-body's duty to refuse any type of war service.

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